

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5740

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMCONSUL BELFAST

AMCONSUL EDINBURGH

AMCONSUL LIVERPOOL

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: HEATH MEETS WITH 1922 COMMITTEE

REF: LONDON 14652

SUMMARY: CONFRONTATION BETWEEN HEATH AND 1922 COMMITTEE APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN A GENTLEMANLY, BLOODLESS ENCOUNTER. HEATH AGREED TO A "REVIEW" OF PROCEDURES FOR ELECTING PARTY LEADER AND ANNOUNCED NAMES OF PARTY OFFICIALS WITH WHOM HE WILL DISCUSS ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMITTEE TO PRESENT RECOMMENDATIONS ON ELECTION PROCEDURES. EVERY INDICATION IS THAT COMMITTEE WILL PROPOSE NEW ELECTION PROCEDURES AND HEATH WILL ANNOUNCE HIS OWN CANDIDACY.
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AS OF NOW, HE WOULD APPEAR NEAR-CERTAIN OF RE-ELECTION

IN VIEW OF LACK OF STRONG ALTERNATIVE CANDIDATES. END SUMMARY.

1. SCHEDULED MEETING BETWEEN 1922 COMMITTEE AND PARTY LEADER HEATH TOOK PLACE NOVEMBER 14. HEATH MADE CLEAR THAT HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF "SERVANT OF THE PARTY" AND IS WILLING TO GO ALONG WITH A REVIEW OF PARTY PROCEDURES FOR ELECTION OF LEADER.

2. HEATH SAID HE WILL CONSULT WITH DU CANN (CHAIRMAN 1922 COMMITTEE), WHITELAW (CHAIRMAN OF PARTY), LORD CARRINGTON (LEADER OF OPPOSITION IN HOUSE OF LORDS), AND SIR JOHN TAYLOR (CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF CONSERVATIVE ASSOCIATIONS). HEATH AND THESE FOUR REPRESENTATIVES WILL DECIDE UPON COMPOSITION OF A "REVIEWING COMMITTEE" WHICH WILL MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ON ELECTION PROCEDURES TO THE 1922 COMMITTEE.

3. MOST SPEAKERS AT MEETING SEEMED TO APPROVE OF THIS MECHANISM BUT AGREED ON THE NEED FOR AN EARLY REPORT, PERHAPS BEFORE CHRISTMAS. HEATH "SAW NO REASON FOR DELAY." WHILE PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT NONE OF THE SPEAKERS CALLED OUTRIGHT FOR HEATH'S RESIGNATION, NEITHER DO THEY SUGGEST ANY GREAT ENTHUSIASM FOR HEATH AT THE MEETING. WHILE HEATH INDICATED HIS WILLINGNESS TO SUBMIT HIS LEADERSHIP TO SOME TYPE OF ELECTION, AT NO TIME DID HE INDICATE ANY LOSS OF INTEREST IN REMAINING LEADER OR ANY INTENTION NOT TO STAND AS A CANDIDATE UNDER NEW ELECTION PROCEDURES YET TO BE DEVISED.

4. AS REPORTED, THE MEETING SEEMED UNENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT EARLIER PROPOSALS TO BROADEN THE ELECTORAL BASE TO INCLUDE THE PARTY AT LARGE OR PARTY ORGANIZATIONS AS SUCH. THERE APPEARS TO BE GROWING SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSAL THAT THE PARTY'S LEADER SHOULD BE ELECTED BY THE 1922 COMMITTEE AND PERHAPS PARTY MEMBERS IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

5. WITH THE CONTINUED ABSENCE OF A WIDELY ACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVE TO HEATH, SOME PARTY MP'S NOW BELIEVE THE PRESENT IMPASSE SHOULD BE SETTLED AS RAPIDLY AS POSSIBLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EVEN WITH A RENEWED ENDORSEMENT OF HEATH AS LEADER. MP'S CHURCHILL AND JENKIN (FORMER MINISTER OF ENERGY) REMARKED TO EMBASSY OFFICER NOVEMBER 13 THAT THE LEADERSHIP CONTROVERSY IS BADLY AFFECTING CONSERVATIVE PERFORMANCE IN PARLIAMENT. JENKIN SEEMS TO FEEL THE PARTY IN OPPOSITION IS BETTER OFF WITH HEATH AS LEADER THAN IT WOULD BE WITH A LESSER FIGURE, AND IT IS THE BICKERING AND CONTROVERSY WHICH SEEMS TO DISTURB HIM MORE THAN THE RELATIVE

STRENGTHS OR WEAKNESSES OF HEATH.

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